

Ariel

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Electronic distribution for Caversham?

Committee to submit plans
to FO in the autumn

A major refit is on the cards for Caversham, the home of the BBC's Monitoring Service. A modernisation committee met for the first time last week and aims to submit broad proposals to the Foreign Office, which funds Caversham, by autumn.

The plan is to prepare the service for the expanding era of monitoring, as satellite broadcasting mushrooms and broadcasting technology develops.

It is the first time there has been a major rethink of the entire Caversham service, which was founded in early wartime.

The five-man committee is chaired by Roland Challis, Monitoring Service Editor of News and Publications.

He said: "The whole face of monitoring will change in the next few years. We will be expected to do more — and new technology can also be used to improve our service."

The committee will be looking at all aspects of the monitoring operation and the use of an electronic distribution system to carry the service's reports both internally within

by ANDREA MICHELL

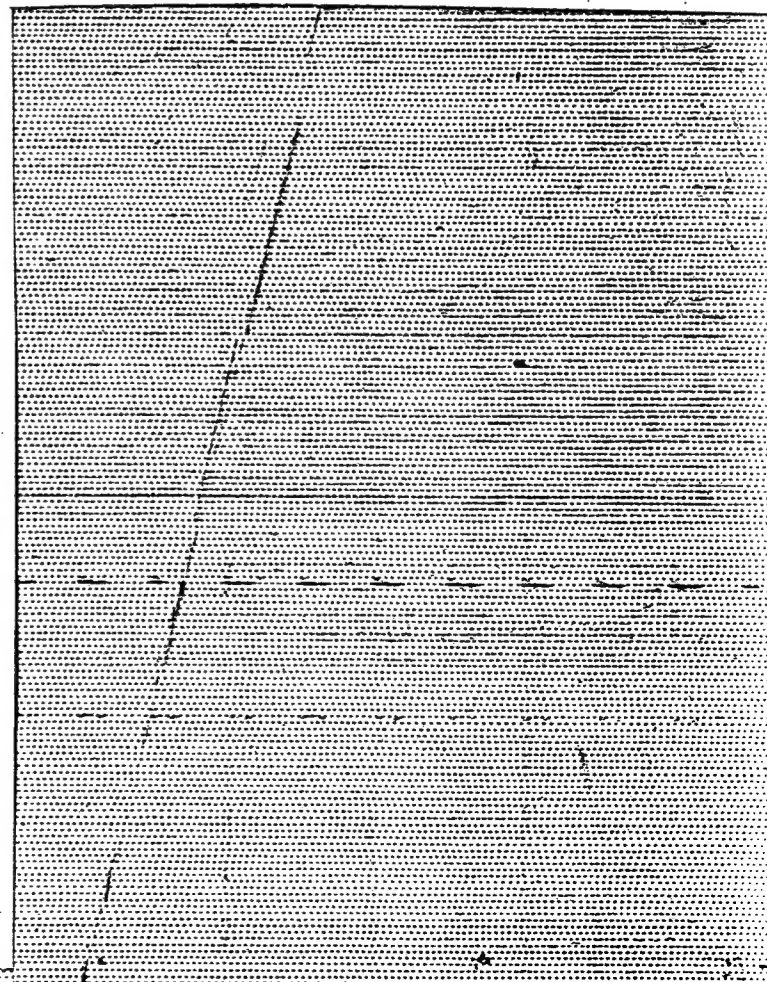
Caversham and to customers.

External Services Assistant News Editor Mike Holmberg, who worked on the introduction of electronic distribution at Bush House is being seconded to Caversham for a year.

And a senior engineer from Studio Capital Projects Department will spend three months working out the specification and functions of an electronic data processing and storing system. This is the upshot of a study group which last year recommended that such a system be installed within five years.

With the system it would be possible for Monitoring Service staff and staff working abroad to input material directly into a computer. It would also be possible to provide an

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'A different generation of monitoring'

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on-line service to customers at home and abroad.

A dish aerial is already being used at Caversham to monitor satellite broadcasts in an experimental way, and this is likely to expand.

"The committee will not be sitting in an ivory tower but will be going out and consulting our 400 staff," Roland Challis said.

"A lot of our equipment has become obsolescent in certain areas. We have to plan for a different generation of monitoring."

Other details such as how much electrical power Caversham will need, how many telephone lines, the matter of a permanent studio facility, and best use of the space available will be considered by the committee.

At present the Monitoring Service

provides a 24-hour teleprinter news service, which is free to BBC newsrooms and the Government and is sold to most the Western news agencies, newspapers and some businesses. The Polish crisis brought 16 new subscribers.

It also publishes in printed form 90,000 words six days a week of summaries of world broadcasts. Again these are free to the BBC and Government, and are sold to academics, specialists, embassies and commercial enterprises as well as news agencies.

● The BBC moved to Caversham, near Reading, Berkshire, in 1943. For the previous 10 years the building had housed a public school, though it was originally built in the 1850s for a Merthyr Tydfil man who made his fortune in iron. It is believed to be the first iron-framed building in Britain.